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THE 4-C's OF LEADERSHIP

By

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First, I want to make the point that organizational structures in which we work in government and in business produce a need for leadership in many people who would not normally be called upon to assume it. I would guess that many of us in the room were not naturally chosen to captain pick-up baseball teams as boys. Most of us are not leaders in the great man sense--the Napoleonic or charismatic concept. We therefore must develop ourselves so that we can take charge of a situation and get the most effective performance out of our associates and subordinates. Leadership has been defined in many ways and I would just as soon accept the simple one--it is getting the job done.

Naturally, when I accepted this assignment, I started thinking about what I might say here this morning. I requested, from my friends in the Personnel Division, some things to read--some statements of wise leaders like Frank Spencer, who has spoken repeatedly on this subject. I received some ten or twelve articles and speeches; but I was very careful. I did not feel that I should cloud up my own thinking with the ideas and conclusions of others, so I prepared the outline which I am going to use before I read any of the pieces of information. Thus, I was able to pick out of these various articles everything that agreed with my plan and eliminate comments of the leaders who said something with which I did not agree, most notably the several articles on "group thinking" and manipulation of people which will not be referred to further by me. I think they are fallacious and in general, pernicious and dishonest.

As most of you know, my only paid experience in leadership has been in research work. I do not think that this either validates or invalidates the points I am making. There is a special need for creativity in research, which, on the surface, does not seem to be required in many other jobs; yet, it has been my observation that the need for a creative approach to the work is just as great in administrative and clerical work as it is in scientific pursuits. You must remember that those of us who are research scientists today, hundreds of thousands of us, in some other period of time, would have been lawyers, bankers and bakers, supplying whatever talents the economy required. The problems of science, and the people who work in science, are not very different from those of lawyers, bankers and bakers.

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To return to this individual without great natural leadership, who wants to get the thing done, what are the characteristics in him, and techniques which he can honestly use to make the program effective? I have classified some of the most important ones as the 4-C's of leadership--Character, Competence, Credit and Confidence.

CHARACTER

By this I mean the highest honesty and fair dealing of which one is capable. It is the first requirement, eliciting the respect of those supervised, which leads to high morale and loyalty.

I find it difficult to develop this concept at any length, for it seems to me to be both an absolute and unarguable one. It's like saying, "there are twelve inches in a foot" -- there isn't much left to be said on that fact, either.

One helpful aspect of this quite rigid idea is that in our supervisory situations, it seems to be less difficult to be strictly honest and fair than in our most closely related group situation, the family. In the family, our emotional involvement is so great, and the effects of our treatment of one member on each of the others has so many possible injurious consequences that the most honest course of action is sometimes hard to see. In my experience of supervision, from below and above, the moral or ethical path to follow has more often than not been clear. Yet, on occasion, the responsibility to the taxpayer and the general public for funds and for successful work has clashed with the responsibility to the individual, and I have spent sleepless nights. I am sure many of you have also, and will again.

COMPETENCE

It is well established that successful results in any activity come directly from a sound knowledge of the subject matter of the job. Some years ago, I participated in a study of the relationship between technical knowledge on a written examination of subject matter and the judgment of supervisors as to the abilities of those examined. The Eastern Laboratory, the Western Laboratory, portions of the National Bureau of Standards, and other organizations were studied. There was a remarkable correlation between the opinions of the supervisors on the capabilities of the people working under them and the workers' ability to show a mastery of subject. This fact can be put to use, by everyone who is a supervisor. He must know the nature of his activity. We speak glibly of the generalist, and certainly there is merit in a broad background and viewpoint; but the supervisor who is going to be a successful leader had better know what he is talking about.

If he has a detailed knowledge and understanding of important phases of the work, he may get away with it if he is relatively weak in other phases; but I insist that there is no substitute for knowledge of the job, the literature in the field, just what the A M's say, just what the Department's policy is in relation to the area in which he works--these are all places where we can never know too much.

Competence has another aspect that I believe is important. A supervisor must be able to explain his plans clearly, to make a speech, to write a clear and unequivocal memorandum or set of instructions. We talk about communications. Sometimes we get rather esoteric. What we really mean is the accurate use of the English language.

CREDIT

It is agreed by most of us that jealousy is a major sin. Who gets the credit for what is a problem faced by all supervisors. I firmly believe that in giving credit where it is earned, and in giving perhaps a little greater credit than a strict analysis might justify, a supervisor does more to build an effective group than he can possibly realize until he has tried it. I do not mean that we should use the "carrot on the stick." I think it is wrong to do so. After the job is done, give credit fully for each contribution. I am sure that a part of my unswerving love and loyalty for my first boss in the Department, Dr. Franklin E. Allison, stems from his completely unselfish tooting of my horn. Authorship on research papers, when earned, can do marvels for the youngster just starting in research. There are many places in other positions in ARS where the GS-5's, 6's, 7's, 9's, 11's--even the big bosses in the supergrades--feel a lot better when their contributions are freely acknowledged.

I have been indulging in this sermon for some minutes, but you will have to bear with me further. A truism exists. If a job is successful, there is plenty of credit for everyone concerned. If a job is unsuccessful, it does not do you the least bit of good to have all the credit for the failure.

CONFIDENCE

The concept I have here is that of not looking over someone's shoulder, of not second guessing, of assigning a task and then getting out of the way so that the employee can do the job. Perhaps it is a group of employees that you are supervising. Leadership must be exerted by showing your full confidence in their being able to do their part of the job without your eagle eye upon them. This has numerous advantages. One is that the employees develop initiative and responsibility under

such leadership. A second, and not an unimportant consideration, is that it leaves you time to develop your competence, to study, to take the longer look at the problem.

Confidence in a group is not only that of the supervisor in subordinates: It is a two-way street. By demonstrating character in your action, by proving your competence, by giving credit to each as he deserves, you can establish confidence in yourself as a leader. When this has been accomplished, you are working as a successful leader, you are applying leadership in supervision.

A corollary of this is the necessary responsibility for taking the blame if things do not go well. You have no better tool for improving morale and the desire of subordinates to contribute their best than a full and quick acceptance of responsibility when things go badly.

It has often been pointed out that the principles of leadership, especially the development of confidence in the leader, show up clearly in organized sports. A homely example was given by Joe Garagiola during the recent playoff between the Giants and the Dodgers, when Walter Alston went to the mound and ordered Roebuck to walk Willy Mays, the potential losing run. As Garagiola analyzed it, "He took the monkey off the pitcher's back and put it on his. That's what makes a ball team." (Incidentally, this maneuver worked, Roebuck got the next batter out.)

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Let me return to some of the articles I read. "The Mainspring of Business Leadership," by Paul Ciffrino in the Harvard Business Review, Vol. 34, No. 5, pp 55-62, (1956), makes some sound observations. One of his major points, which I have not stressed, is that people do like to work; that no tricks are needed to get them to work effectively; that, as he says, "management need only provide a decent company environment among normal decent people." I agree completely.

Ciffrino also has some trenchant comments on manipulation of employees by techniques derived from Madison Avenue. He considers them shallow, immoral, and "not proper tools for the building of a lucid, disciplined, intellectually loyal, and harmonious business community." I urge you to read his article to get the full flavor of the sound arguments he presents.

In "Understanding Leadership," W. C. H. Prentice in Harvard Business Review, Vol. 39, No. 5, pp. 143-151, (1961), gives a perceptive analysis of the problem of leadership as he sees it. He gives a hypothetical statement which a supervisor might use to an employee coming into a group.

"There is nothing personal about this. Anyone in your post would get the same treatment. But as long as you work for me, I am going to see that you get every opportunity to use your last ounce of potential. Your growth and satisfaction are a part of my job. The faster you develop into a top contributor to this company, the better I will like it. If you see a better way to do your job, do it that way; if something is holding you back, come and see me about it. If you are right, you will get all the help I can give you plus the recognition you deserve."

Each of you can analyze that statement and see in it the application of the 4-C's, Character, Competence, Credit and Confidence, clearly interwoven.

There are, naturally, other ways in which these ideas can be organized and many more aspects of leadership than those I have stressed; but I do think that simplifying the relationship between the supervisor and the members of the group by resolving them back to these 4-C's, will furnish an excellent basis for good supervisory leadership.

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